SYNOPSIS

ROLE OF CULTURE IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISTION: A CASE STUDY OF THE ENGLISH SYLLABUS OF AIRLINE AND AIRPORT MANAGEMENT, SREENIDHI VAUGHN COLLEGE OF AERONAUTICS AND TECHNOLOGY, HYDERABAD, A.P.

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February 2013

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Teaching culture in second language is certainly as important as teaching anthropology, language and literature. It is one of the most important concepts in social sciences like Psychology, political science and economics, which has now made direct or indirect impact on applied linguistics and second language acquisition as well. Societal values, beliefs, cultural elements, attitudes should be incorporated with in communicative approach to increase the effectiveness of second language learning by motivating the learners to learn the language with zeal and enthusiasm. The aim of language teaching is to develop the learners' cultural as well as linguistic competence which can be summed up as intercultural competence. But in most language learning situations it is ignored to a great extent.

But in recent times, due to the paradigm shift in language teaching, the teachers are expected to include cultural components in teaching with a distinct outlook on culture. This outlook which emerges from social sciences, defines 'culture' as a broad term that embraces in it many aspects of a given society like arts, food, environment, customs and traditions, religious beliefs and practices, ethics, morals and manners. Consequently, culture includes everything that man has either inherited or acquired and learnt in his personal as well as social life. We are influenced by our culture in all the ways and no man can actually escape from the vicissitudes of his or her culture. It is apt to quote what Horton said "man is the prisoner of his culture" (qtd. in Pandit 22).

The debate over incorporating cultural material in English language text books is still paramount with great diversity of opinions. How to include these cultural components in the text books is the moot point. Kramsch believes that culture should

not be considered as the fifth skill in language learning because it is hidden in the four other language skills, namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing. As such, if second language learners are taught culture, along with language they will be able to encode proper implications. Second language learners should equip themselves with a considerable knowledge of target culture traits for the target culture's connotations work in the back of their minds. It is apt to quote Finochiaro:

> Bilingualism and biculturalism are not sufficient for living and participating in today's interdependent world. It is our responsibility to prepare learners to cope not only with the world's universal problems and behaviours, but with its many ethnic and cultural systems (qtd. in Prodromou 49).

Language is an important part in culture which can not be either neglected or over-rated. Learning a language is coloured and tempered by social and historical context in which it is learned, taught and acquired. Both context and culture play an important role in understanding the meaning that is encoded in the language. Kachru rightly says that: "interactive acts" are determined by the "context of culture" and "context of situation". What appears lexically, colocationally and semantically deviant from native speaker's point of view is culturally and situationally appropriate from non-native speaker's angle (qtd. in Sood 55).

Eli Hinkel believed that, Culture and language are inseparable and constitute "a single universe or domain of experience" (qtd. in Hinkel 6). Cultural awareness and learning second culture or the target culture will help in attaining proficiency in second language learning. This implies that a second language learner necessarily, learns the second language culture simply as language cannot be taught or exist in

isolation. No language can be understood and taught without understanding the cultural context in which it is used.

The present research work focuses on the fundamental necessity of incorporating culture in second language learning. Further, it also proposes to bring changes in curriculum and to restructure the existing syllabus of English language and literature at both undergraduate and post graduate level. The role of culture in understanding the language is analyzed and developed from three different perspectives. Firstly, it is observed and accepted that no two cultures are identical and hence culture creates differences and tension and acts as a catalyst in accelerating or decelerating the process of learning. Secondly, learning culture is a continuous process as any other learning and thirdly, culture can be used in teaching English either in monolingual and monocultural or multilingual and multicultural societies.

Learning a second language implies adjusting not only to the linguistic but also to the cultural system of the target language. The extent of adjustment with the culture of the target language depends on the extent of exposure and the environs in which one lives and learns. Culture is embedded in language and language symbolizes cultural reality. Form of language is moulded by culture. Thus no language is ever free from its culture. This interconnectivity influences many factors in language learning but unfortunately, it is often neglected in teaching or learning English as a second language. Recent changes in both language teaching methods and theories suggest that culture should be incorporated as an important element in language learning. The ability to use language is determined not only by grammatical accuracy, but also by contextual requirements, which is labelled 'socio-linguistic competence.' Grammatical competency includes knowledge of vocabulary, rules regarding

pronunciation of verbs and nouns, concord, word formation, and above all syntax. Socio-linguistic competence emphasizes the appropriate use of language in specific and different cultural contexts. Thus, knowledge of linguistics and socio-linguistics is indispensable for viable communication. As such, culture becomes an important element in a language classroom, because cultural knowledge lies within sociolinguistic competence. "The full effect of a word upon its hearer may depend not only upon the context but upon the whole physical and psychological environment, and on many occasions, upon his experience of the culture of which the language forms an integral part" (Pandit 28). Thus knowledge of culture becomes essential for achieving linguistic competence.

The lexical meaning of a word can be drawn from the dictionary meaning. Nevertheless, the meaning of the word as taken from the dictionary has no context. It is in fact dead. Word attains life only when the human beings use it in appropriate context. It is clear that these appropriate situations in which semantic aspects function to the optimum would be the situations that are remarkably related to the cultural attitudes and beliefs of the language in use. Problems in understanding arise only when the same semantic aspect functions in more than one culture. Inadequate knowledge of the meaning of a word in its cultural context, results in miscommunication and misinterpretation. Cross-cultural misinterpretations often occur because the second language learner understands the meaning of the word as he does in his/her own culture. For example, the Americans might misinterpret the word 'Congress' in Indian context. 'Congress' signifies Parliament in America. In India it actually means the name of a political party.

Edward Sapir defines culture as 'the socially inherited assemblage of practices and beliefs that determine the texture of our lives' (qtd. in Trivedi 93). These socially inherited assemblages of practices and beliefs can be further divided into three units, viz., Static, Processes and Qualities. Static unit includes human beings, animals, places of worship etc. Processes unit speaks about different habits of people like, playing, travelling, reading, watching and thinking etc. Qualities unit comprises of various other aspects like good, bad, moral, immoral, legal, illegal etc. The above mentioned categories of units are same in a given culture in a given time. Thus culture entwines all the aspects of shared life in a community. These aspects differ from society to society. For instance, the terms 'legal' and 'illegal' have different meanings in different cultures. Thus, apart from the lexical meaning of a word, the contextual or cultural meaning is important. Culture plays a vital role in communication. Communicating internationally is communicating interculturally.

The necessity for understanding target culture arises from the fact that majority of the language learners face difficulties in communicating the meaning intended to the native speakers. The study of culture accords students a reason to study second language meaningfully. Although many English text books give genuine examples from real life situations to teach grammatical aspects, without contextual comprehension those real life situations may be considered as imaginary situations by the learners. Further, by providing access to cultural aspects of language the syllabus and the curriculum aid the learners to associate forms and sounds of a language to real life situations and people.

Culture classes motivate the learners to learn the language through culturally related activities like knowing and doing research about different countries, their food habits, climatic conditions, etiquette etc. The study of culture enhances learners' curiosity and sometimes deep interest to learn and understand the cultures of different countries. Apart from this, studying culture creates a positive attitude towards the members of the target culture. This is definitely important in our age of post-modernism where tolerance towards different religions, cultures and ideologies are expected and appreciated in higher realms of social order. General education should take a cue from the relation between language and culture and introduce curriculum that includes history, literature and history of ideas of a particular nation. History of ideas is the source from which a nation's culture emanates. It is possible to overcome the limitations of monocultural boundaries only by studying different cultures. To conclude culture classes have an educational and enlightening influence on both the language learner and the learning process.

According to Valette:

> For the classroom teacher, cultural goals may be divided into four categories: developing a greater awareness of and a broader knowledge about the target culture; acquiring a command of the etiquette of the target culture; understanding differences between the target culture and the students' culture; and understanding the values of the target culture' (qtd. in Prodromou 41).

Second language learning brings in association of two languages and two cultures though not intimately. Yet another dimension is teaching Second language through culture enthuses' the learners to learn the language with avid interest. The

present study is undertaken with this aspect as the main premise. Thus the main focus of this work is to find out the attitudes and opinions of English language teachers and learners in incorporating various cultural components in English syllabus.

The present study is divided into six chapters. The first chapter provides an elaborate introduction to the topic of study Role of Culture in Second Language Acquisition: A case study of English Syllabus of Airline and Airport Management, Sreenidhi Vaughn College of Aeronautics and Technology. The chapter deals with the need for culture inclusive study in the classroom. The aims and objectives are discussed at length.

The second chapter is an attempt to define culture and hence deals with the term culture extensively and elaborately. Different definitions of the word 'culture' are analyzed in detail. The chapter deals with various characteristic features of culture. It emphasises the manner in which culture is related to language and vice-versa. The relationship of culture with psychological cognition is discussed. The association of culture with non-verbal communication and vocabulary is discussed within the set scope.

Till now, English is taught as a compulsory subject from Class VI in Government and Government aided schools. Of late the Government of Andhra Pradesh made English a compulsory subject at the primary level of education (classes I to X) in all Government and Government aided schools. This is because English is considered as a national link language, library language, and language of opportunities. Thus, English language is given great priority even in the field of primary education.

The third chapter deals with English language teaching in India from a historical point of view. The chapter discusses how English language entered India. The discussion focuses on the main reasons for the spread of English language in India, its growth and sustenance in the past. It brings forth the role being played by English language in the present and the expanding scope for the language in India to reach a high water mark.

Literature is the media through which culture could be transmitted. It enhances positive reception and perception of the target culture and aids in increasing the comprehension levels of the students. With this strong sense of belief, four short stories were selected and analyzed in the fourth chapter. The selected short stories depict Indian, South African, French and American cultures respectively.

Any collection of short story in this dissertation is considered an important genre to know varied cultures in brief. Students enjoy reading and interpreting short stories to the satisfaction and occasional wonderment of the teacher, students participate in classroom discussion of the major themes, plot, characters and, writing style of each of the authors.

By understanding culture, students gain knowledge about the past and the present. They examine how culture underwent changes from time to time. Study of culture enables them to understand people's customs, traditions, beliefs and attitudes. Culture teaches endurance directly or indirectly and urges them to develop tolerance by recognizing, appreciating and respecting peoples' cultural differences and sensitivities.

In dealing with the short stories in the interactive class room session, the teacher adhered to a regular pattern. Great care has been taken to see to it that all the

four skills of language occupy centrality. The ‘warm up’ is followed by the text of the short story. The initial ‘warm’ up in a way related to the story allows the students to fall into the thought tune of the lesson. Warm up is associated with the story and as the story progresses they will find themselves at ease in appreciating the text. Author’s biography is provided under the heading ‘About the author’. Objectives are listed out for the students to understand why do they read the story and what salient features make the story what it is. The ‘Glossary’ section enables the students to understand the meanings of different words the author used in the text. Under ‘Case Study’ the students are expected to compare and contrast the present story with another story written by a different author. The main aim of the case study is to provide the learners with an opportunity to read, realize, and relish other cultures.

Frequently asked questions are given under writing component for the students to analyze their understanding of the lesson. A self-study assignment which also falls under the writing component tests the students’ knowledge of culture as portrayed in the story. This component aims at creating, developing and evaluating cultural competence in the students. Speaking ability of the students is tested through a quotation or a saying or an idiomatic expression that is actually related to the main theme of the story. The students are expected to speak with reference to the story that is keeping the story as the back drop.

Reading Comprehension followed by few questions is included to test and develop students’ ability to skim and scan for necessary information from a passage or a text. Reading Comprehension passages that are selected reflect the culture as portrayed in the lesson. An important cultural component is selected and appropriate

reading material is provided for the students to facilitate them with better understanding of the culture embedded in the story.

Finally an assignment is given for the students to gather more information about the cultural aspects as depicted in the story.

At the end of every story, brief, clear and concise information on an aspect of culture as, highlighted in the story, is given for the students to have a deeper understanding of the culture.

This approach evidently has enhanced the classroom participation and improved the performance of the students. The students received the information on different cultures with great enthusiasm, appreciation and respect. They compared various aspects of their culture with the culture that is portrayed in the lesson. Inclusion of cultural elements in the lesson has widened the students' English language learning and understanding abilities. Various tasks that are given at the end of every lesson have given the students an opportunity to speak, read and write in the language.

Teachers and students occupy an important place in teaching and learning a language. With this intention questionnaires to both teachers and the students were given. The fifth chapter deals with the interpretation of the questionnaires given to both teachers and the students. The teachers' questionnaire consisted of fifty questions. The questionnaire is a mixture of close-ended questions or questions with two or four options. This facilitated to analyze the data accurately. It also provided an opportunity to the teachers to answer even sensitive questions without much hesitation. The chapter deals with the findings and interpretation of the students' questionnaire. Twenty close ended questions with two or four options were given to

the students. The questions tested students understanding on various aspects like the importance of English language, inclusion of cultural components in the English syllabus, the desired percentage of cultural components in the syllabus etc. The findings of these questionnaires form the crux of the research work.

The responses of the teachers and the students are framed in a picture diagram of a Doughnut chart. Five questions from the eleven participants are analyzed in one chart. Hence, the analysis of twenty questions is depicted in four charts. Each ring represents the analysis of one question. The first ring from the centre shows the responses of the students for the first question. The second ring shows the analysis for the second and continues in the same way for all the other three questions. The last ring represents fifth question. The same method is used in interpreting the teachers' questionnaire which consisted of fifty questions.

After a thorough interpretation of the questionnaires it can be concluded that there is an immense need for a change in the existing English syllabus both at the college as well as university level. The present English syllabus demands a fresh look. This is possible by incorporating local cultural as well as multicultural components as a part of the syllabus. Both methods and materials should be changed according to the changing needs of the students and according to the ever growing demands of the industry, especially Airline and Airport industry. The teaching materials should provoke interest and arouse the curiosity in the students to learn the language along with its culture.

Chapter six, the concluding chapter discusses the various inferences derived from the interpretation of the questionnaires. The conclusions based on the study and findings are also established in this last chapter. This chapter also provides important

suggestions and recommendations based on the observations and findings of the study.

Finally to conclude, culture should be taught as an important component through text books. Short stories that reflect different cultural aspects should occupy an important place in the text books along with a few short poems and dramatic pieces. Culture can also be taught through authentic materials like video clippings, newspapers, magazines, television shows and films. In addition culture can be taught through culture capsules, role plays and through discussion of the proverbs. Awareness and understanding the cultural contexts of day to day greetings, giving and receiving compliments is as important as understanding the grammatical structures of a language.

Culture should be a vital and an essential component in Second language learning. Second language teachers should identify the important and key cultural components and impart them to their students. The student community at large can become successful language learners only if cultural aspects are inherent in the syllabus and curriculum.

Incorporating both local and alien cultural components in English language curriculum helps in preserving rich local cultural heritage and at the same time enhances learners' ability to comprehend a second language in all its totality. On the other hand, adding cultural components from different cultures will enrich learners' tolerance towards other cultures. It will enable them to compare and contrast their culture with other cultures in a positive frame of mind. This is very important in a fast and technologically developing age where students migrate from one nation to the other in search of higher studies, job and livelihood. It is apt to quote Sri Aurobindo:

“To know other countries is not to belittle but enlarge our own country and help it to a greater power of its own being, and to know the other countries of the soul is to widen our bounds and make more opulent and beautiful the earth on which we live” (Future Poetry 251-252).

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